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RUEPGDA/USEUCOM JIC VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY

UNCLAS ATHENS 001741

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TAGS: [OPS](#) [CASC](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [GR](#)

SUBJECT: GREEK FIRES: AUGUST 31 UPDATE

REF: ATHENS 1733 AD PREVIOUS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED -- PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) The Greek wild fires continue to diminish. The Greek Government's focus is turning to reconstruction and support for victims. There has been prominent coverage of President Bush's message of condolence to PM Karamanlis. The Government of Greece has welcomed U.S. firefighting equipment and technical assistance, and a U.S. technical assistance team will arrive over the weekend. MOD officials have declined, for now, an offer of overhead imagery, but have suggested they will want it in a few days. End Summary.

Diminished Fires

¶2. (U) The Greek Fire Service has reported that only one major blaze remains, near Karytaina in the southern Peloponnese peninsula. Firefighting efforts are also still ongoing in the Western Peloponnese and the island of Evia. There remains a continued danger as a new heat wave is forecast for this weekend.

¶3. (U) The Greek Government's focus appears now to be assistance to victims. PM Karamanlis and his Ministers have been publicly reiterating pledges to rebuild residences and provide assistance to those affected by the fires. The Board of Directors of the Government's special fund met 8/30 to determine priorities and procedures for providing urgent assistance.

¶4. (U) Meanwhile, estimates are that up to 20,000 people have collected about 72.4 million Euros in emergency relief payments. Greek press have reported extensively on the "no red tape" procedures, allowing individuals to receive immediate payments. On 8/30 the government made its first arrests of individuals suspected of lying to obtain emergency payments, detaining 15 individuals for obtaining funds under false pretenses in the Peloponnese.

POTUS Condolence Message

¶5. (U) The Government of Greece released the POTUS Condolence message 8/31. It has received prominent coverage.

U.S. Assistance

¶6. (U) The Government of Greece has welcomed and accepted our offer of fire fighting equipment and technical assistance. Embassy Athens is coordinating a USAID donation of 3,000 equipment kits. Furthermore, the Greek government has welcomed the planned arrival of a U.S. technical assistance team on September 2. The team will consult with the GOG, provide technical expertise, and help develop a plan for follow-on action in the areas of fire management, management systems, burned area rehabilitation, fire investigation, and ecosystem watershed rehabilitation.

Overhead Imagery

¶7. (SBU) Following consultations with EUCOM, DATT contacted appropriate officials at the Ministry of Defense to offer overhead imagery to help locate fires and access damage. They declined our offer at this time, but suggested that they will want this imagery within the next few days.

COUNTRYMAN